IN THE CLAIMS

- 1. (Currently amended) A capacitor formed on a semiconductor substrate, the capacitor comprising:
 - a first electrode region of a first stair-stepped metal layer;
 - a contact region of the first stair-stepped metal layer;
- a second electrode of a second metal layer that is closer to the substrate than the first stair-stepped metal layer;

a dielectric layer intermediate the first electrode region and the second electrode, the dielectric layer including a contact opening therethrough in the vicinity of the contact region,

wherein the first stair-stepped metal layer in a stair-stepped region thereof steps laterally and downwardly across the dielectric layer and into and at least partway laterally across the contact opening; and

a wire electrically coupled to <u>and in contact with a bottom surface of the contact</u> region of the first stair-stepped metal layer through the contact opening in the dielectric layer,

wherein the first electrode region is electrically coupled to the wire through the contact opening in the dielectric layer.

- 2. (Original) The capacitor of claim 1 wherein the wire is formed of a third metal layer that is closer to the substrate than the second metal layer.
- 3. (Original) The capacitor of claim 1 wherein the wire is formed of the second metal layer.
 - 4. (Cancelled)
- 5. (Previously presented) The capacitor of claim 1 wherein the contact opening comprises a plurality of separate contact holes.
- 6. (Original) The capacitor of claim 1 wherein the wire has a planarized top surface.
- 7. (Original) The capacitor of claim 6 wherein the wire comprises a damascene layer.

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- 8. (Cancelled)
- 9. (Cancelled)
- 10. (Cancelled)
- 11. (Cancelled)
- 12. (Currently amended) A metal-insulator-metal capacitor, comprising:
 a wire layer formed in a first metal layer, the wire layer including a first electrode contacting line;

a bottom electrode formed in a second metal layer;

wherein the wire layer comprises a second electrode contacting line, and wherein the second electrode contacting line is coupled to a bottom surface of the bottom electrode;

a top electrode formed in a third metal layer, the top electrode disposed over the bottom electrode;

a dielectric layer separating the bottom electrode from the top electrode;

a contact formed between the first electrode contacting line and a bottom side of the top electrode; and

a second contact located on a top side of the bottom electrode,

wherein a portion of the bottom surface of the bottom electrode directly contacts a top surface of the second electrode contacting line and not through a contact hole[[.]], and

wherein a portion of the bottom surface of the bottom electrode directly contacts a top surface of the second electrode contacting line and not through a contact hole.

- 13. (Previously presented) The capacitor of claim 12 wherein the bottom electrode couples to the second electrode contacting line through a contact hole in an insulation layer.
- 14. (Previously presented) The capacitor of claim 12 wherein the first and second electrode contacting lines each have a planarized top surface.
- 15. (Original) The capacitor of claim 14 wherein the first and second contacting lines are planarized by a damascene process.

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- 16. (Original) The capacitor of claim 14 wherein the first and second contacting lines are planarized by a CMP process performed on an interlayer dielectric layer.
- 17. (Previously presented) The capacitor of claim 12 wherein a top surface of the first and second contacting lines are formed in a process other than planarization.
 - 18. (Cancelled)
- 19. (Currently amended) The capacitor of claim 12[[8]], wherein the second contact extends away from a[[the]] substrate farther than the third metal layer.
- 20. (Currently amended) A metal-insulator-metal capacitor, comprising:
 a first metal layer including a bottom electrode and an electrode contacting line;
 a top <u>stair-stepped</u> electrode formed in a second metal layer, the top electrode
 disposed over the bottom electrode;
 - a dielectric layer separating the bottom electrode from the top electrode;
- a contact formed between the electrode contacting line and a bottom side of the top electrode; and
 - a second contact located on a top side of the bottom electrode.
- 21. (Previously presented) A metal-insulator-metal capacitor, comprising:
 a first metal layer including a bottom electrode and an electrode contacting line;
 a top electrode formed in a second metal layer, the top electrode disposed over the
 bottom electrode;
- a dielectric layer separating the bottom electrode from the top electrode; a contact formed between the electrode contacting line and a bottom side of the top electrode; and
 - a second contact located on a top side of the bottom electrode, wherein the top electrode couples to the electrode contacting line through a contact
- wherein the top electrode couples to the electrode contacting line through a contact hole in the dielectric layer.
- 22. (Original) The capacitor of claim 21, wherein the contact hole comprises a plurality of separate holes.

23. (Cancelled)

- 24. (Currently amended) The capacitor of claim 21, wherein the second contact extends away from a[[the]] substrate farther than the second metal layer.
- 25. (Previously presented) The capacitor of claim 21 wherein the bottom electrode and the electrode contacting line each have a planarized top surface.
- 26. (Original) The capacitor of claim 25 wherein the bottom electrode and the electrode contacting line are planarized by a damascene process.
- 27. (Original) The capacitor of claim 25 wherein the bottom electrode and the electrode contacting line are planarized by a CMP process performed on an interlayer dielectric layer.
- 28. (Previously presented) The capacitor of claim 21 wherein the bottom electrode and the electrode contacting line are formed in a process other than planarization.

29-51. (Cancelled)

- 52. (Currently amended) A metal-insulator-metal capacitor, comprising:
 a wire layer formed in a first metal layer, the wire layer including a first electrode contacting line;
 - a bottom electrode formed in a second metal layer;
- a <u>stair-stepped</u> top electrode formed in a third metal layer, the top electrode disposed over the bottom electrode;
 - a dielectric layer separating the bottom electrode from the top electrode; and
- a contact formed between the electrode contacting line and a bottom side of the top electrode, wherein the top electrode couples to the first electrode contacting line through a contact hole in the dielectric layer, the contact hole having a vertical:horizontal aspect ratio of less than about 1:1.